

# **Sexual harassment of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina:**

Analysis Based on Data  
from the OSCE-led Survey  
on Violence against Women

May 2022

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents findings of the OSCE's quantitative and qualitative study in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) on violence against women (VAW). The study was implemented in the spring and summer of 2018.

THE STUDY INVOLVED A SURVEY OF  
A REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE OF

**2.321**

WOMEN AGED

**18 - 74**

LIVING IN BIH

..... THIS FIGURE INCLUDES

**1.163**

women in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH),

**1.019**

in the Republika Srpska (RS),

**139**

in the Brčko District (BD)

This survey aimed to establish the prevalence, characteristics and consequences of these forms of violence using a multistage, stratified, random probability sample design.

In general, the findings of this research were similar across the BiH Entities and BD. The results have been presented separately in cases where a statistically significant difference can be noted.

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**SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS “ANY FORM OF UNWANTED VERBAL, NON-VERBAL OR PHYSICAL CONDUCT OF A SEXUAL NATURE WITH THE PURPOSE OR EFFECT OF VIOLATING THE DIGNITY OF A PERSON, IN PARTICULAR WHEN CREATING AN INTIMIDATING, HOSTILE, DEGRADING, HUMILIATING OR OFFENSIVE ENVIRONMENT”.**

*Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) (Article 40)*

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## KEY FINDINGS

Sexual harassment is one of the most common forms of gender-based violence in BiH. In an 2019 OSCE-led survey, almost one in three women in BiH reported having experienced at least one form of sexual harassment since the age of 15, and one in 10 reported having experienced it in the period of 12 months before the survey.

Sexual harassment is more prevalent than other forms of non-partner violence (physical or sexual), but less prevalent than intimate partner violence, which the survey suggests is the most widespread and harmful<sup>1</sup>. Sexual harassment is a part of a complex system of violence against women and takes many forms. The most prevalent of these are inappropriate staring or leering, intrusive and offensive questions about one's private life, intrusive and offensive comments about one's physical appearance, sexually suggestive comments or offensive jokes, and inappropriate invitations to go out on dates.



## PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Based on the results of the survey, almost three in ten women in BiH report to have experienced at least some form of sexual harassment since the age of 15. The survey also highlights that the prevalence of reported sexual harassment in BiH is lower than in the EU and other countries in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. This could be down to lower readiness to disclose such experiences among those interviewed in BiH. This can be the case due to various reasons, such as lower awareness and a lack of recognition of some forms of sexual harassment as a form of violence. A contributing factor to the lower disclosure of sexual harassment cases by women can also be the social environment and social norms encouraging high rates of tolerance for such acts, creating pressure on women to ignore such experiences or even being led to understand them as having affectionate intentions. The awareness argument is supported by the fact that **women who disclosed in the survey that they had experienced sexual harassment were also more likely to disclose having experienced other forms of partner or non-partner violence, thus suggesting higher awareness of how violence affects women's lives.**

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<sup>1</sup> OSCE Survey on Well-Being and Safety of Women – Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2019. Page 25.



## PERPETRATORS

Men are reported as being the main perpetrators of sexual harassment. Women who reported having experienced sexual harassment most often point to **unknown perpetrators** (62 per cent), followed by friends, acquaintances, or neighbours (29 per cent), or someone else familiar to the victim but not specified in the available categories (23 per cent). Somebody from work (a colleague or boss) was reported by 17 per cent of women who had been subject to sexual harassment.<sup>2</sup>

Male perpetrators appear in various roles. In some forms of sexual harassment, partners (current or previous) are highly present. Partners were regularly reported as being responsible for forced viewing of pornography, unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing, unwanted and offensive sexually explicit messages, and sexually suggestive comments or jokes. Acquaintances, friends, or neighbours are more often mentioned in the context of intrusive and offensive questions about one's private life or appearance, sexually suggestive comments or jokes that offend women. Unsurprisingly, the workplace is a space where women most often experience various forms of sexual harassment by their colleagues and bosses. In this context, sexual harassment mostly manifests itself in inappropriate invitations to go out on dates, intrusive and offensive comments about appearance, intrusive and offensive questions about private life, but also in more severe forms including sexually suggestive comments or jokes that offend women. Strangers are noted as being the main perpetrators of acts including inappropriate staring or leering, inappropriate advances on social networks and the internet, and offensive sexually explicit emails or SMS.

Around a third of sexual harassment incidents included other women acting together with men. However, these are usually less severe forms of harassment, such as inappropriate staring or leering, intrusive questions about one's private life or comments about one's physical appearance.

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<sup>2</sup> OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women. Well-being and Safety of Women, Bosnia and Herzegovina Results Report, p. 35.



## RISKS

The risk of being a victim of sexual harassment is not evenly distributed among various groups of women. Younger women, those living in urban areas, students or economically active women (particularly those who are in precarious employment) are at the highest risk of sexual harassment. Women with a vulnerable background, whether this is linked to income deprivation, minority status or forced displacement, are also more often exposed to sexual harassment.



## CONSEQUENCES

As a consequence of exposure to sexual harassment, many women suffer an immediate emotional reaction. These include embarrassment, annoyance, anger, shock, fear, shame, but also longer and more profound psychological consequences, such as suffering from a feeling of vulnerability, anxiety, loss of self-confidence, or depression. This is especially the case if incidents are repeated.

A majority of women do not share their experiences of sexual harassment with others. In cases where they do, this is mainly limited to their immediate social networks – friends, family members, partners – but not to institutions and organizations that are specialized in supporting victims of gender-based violence.

# INTRODUCTION

## MORE INFORMATION ON THE SURVEY AND THE COMPARABILITY OF RESULTS:

The OSCE Survey has been conducted on a representative sample of 15,179 women in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, Moldova(a) and Ukraine (b). The research was also conducted in Kosovo (c). Women aged 18–74 were interviewed face-to-face using a multi-stage, random probability approach. The data is weighted to the known population profile within each OSCE participating state. An additional weight (population weight) was calculated to enable reporting for the entire sample of the selected OSCE participating States or for a subgroup thereof. This weight reflects the distribution of the survey population across the area covered. The key socio-demographics used were women's age, work status, whether they lived in a rural or urban area and whether they were affected by conflict or not. This research is based on the methodology of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), which was used for the 2012 survey on violence against women in 28 European Union Member States. This OSCE-led survey is therefore comparable to the FRA survey.

- (a) The Transdniestrian region has not been covered by the survey. However, one focus group discussion was held with women from this region.
- (b) The sample in Ukraine does not cover the Autonomous Republic of Crimea or non-government-controlled areas in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The survey was carried out on a sample representative of the adult population of women (2,048 women aged 18–74), including 298 women living close to the contact line in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, in an effort to better understand how conflict affects violence against women.
- (c) All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

This report presents findings of the OSCE's quantitative and qualitative study in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) on violence against women (VaW). The study was implemented in spring/summer 2018 and involved a survey of a representative sample of 2,321 women aged 18–74 living in BiH to establish the prevalence, characteristics and consequences of violence using a multistage, stratified, random probability sample design. Of the respondents, 1,163 live in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), 1,019 in the Republika Srpska (RS) and 139 in the Brčko District (BD).

Based on the findings of the survey, the OSCE published a report in 2019, focusing on the prevalence of violence, attitudes and its impact. The report also investigated experiences of violence among specific groups of women and dedicated a section to how conflict affected women's experiences of violence.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the issue of violence against women, particularly sexual violence and sexual harassment, was brought to the fore in January 2021 when a movement of solidarity with victims of rape and sexual violence was initiated through a Facebook page titled “Nisam tražila” (“I did not ask for it”). This prompted a debate on misogyny, sexism, and the normalization of violence – including sexual harassment – across the region. Understanding that very little is known about the prevalence and forms of sexual harassment in the country, the OSCE Mission to BiH embarked on a secondary analysis of the survey results to closely examine this topic.

This policy brief looks into the scope of sexual harassment and aims to outline several aspects relevant to policymaking and advocacy. It looks to provide evidence-based information on the prevalence of sexual harassment and its consequences.

It is important to note that each prevalence survey attempts to measure experiences across an entire population, however, surveys that reflect intimate, personal experiences such as those dealing with VaW can only outline the broad picture. While this report has made every attempt to fairly assess the prevalence of this form of violence, it is important to underline that the assumption is that these findings represent solely an outline of the issue at hand. It must be assumed that, even in a survey of this scale, many women will be reluctant to share their experiences.



## SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS A FORM OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE USED AGAINST WOMEN AS A MEANS OF REPRODUCING UNBALANCED POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN.

**Sexual harassment is a form of gender-based violence that is rooted in unbalanced gender relations.** Whilst both men and women can become victims of sexual harassment, women are most commonly the target of this form of gender-based violence. Violence against women represents a type of social relation through which directly or indirectly, via interpersonal or structural violence,<sup>3</sup> control over the choices, roles and behaviours of women is maintained in various spheres of life and social participation. Such use of violence sustains patriarchal gender regimes<sup>4</sup> in society.

Violence against women and girls<sup>5</sup> is defined by key international human rights instruments<sup>6</sup> as a “manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.” Three decisions of the OSCE Ministerial Council reiterate that VaW is “one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the OSCE area”<sup>7</sup>, and recognize that “abuse, threats, and harassment, including sexual harassment, have become increasingly common, especially through digital technologies, and may silence women’s and girls’ voices in the public sphere”.<sup>8</sup> Istanbul convention notes that member States of the Council of Europe are required to take measures to ensure that these forms of violence are subject to criminal or other legal sanctions.

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<sup>3</sup> Babović, M. (2015) *Teorijski i istraživački pristupi u proučavanju strukturnog, kulturnog i direktnog nasilja* (Theoretical and research approaches in studying of structural, cultural and direct violence), Sociologija, Vol. 57, br. 2, pp. 331-352.

<sup>4</sup> Gender regimes are “relatively structured relations between men and women, masculinity and femininity, in institutional and non-institutional environments, both on the level of discourse and practice. This structuring is embodied in different gender roles, diverse gender identities and different gender representations...” Blagojević, M. (2002) «Žene i muškarci u Srbiji 1990-2000: urođnjavanje cene haosa», u Bolčić, S, Milić, A. (ur.) *Srbija krajem milenijuma: razaranje društva, promene i svakodnevni život*, ISIFF, Belgrade, pp. 293-314.

<sup>5</sup> Violence against girls is important form of violence against women, but it is not included in the analysis presented in this brief as the data used for the analysis are based on the sample of women old 18-74 years.

<sup>6</sup> Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979; Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993; Beijing Platform for Action, 1995; Istanbul convention, 2011; Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993

<sup>7</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council Decision no 7/14

<sup>8</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council Decision, no 4/18

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT INCLUDES HARMFUL ACTS OF A SEXUAL NATURE THAT HUMILIATE WOMEN, BUT IS NOT THE SAME AS SEXUAL VIOLENCE.

In the OSCE-led survey, sexual harassment is recognized through the set of actions listed below.<sup>9</sup> The most severe forms are highlighted (points 1,2,7,8,9, and 10):<sup>10</sup>

- 1) Unwelcome touching, hugging, or kissing
- 2) Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that offended you
- 3) Inappropriate invitations to go out on dates
- 4) Intrusive questions about your private life that offended you
- 5) Intrusive comments about your appearance that offended you
- 6) Inappropriate staring or leering that you found intimidating
- 7) Somebody sending or showing you sexually explicit pictures, photos or gifts that offended you
- 8) Somebody indecently exposing themselves to you
- 9) Somebody making you watch or look at pornographic material against your wishes
- 10) Unwanted sexually explicit emails or text messages that offended you
- 11) Inappropriate advances that offended you on social networking websites such as Facebook, or in internet chat rooms.

**Sexual harassment can lead to sexual violence, but it is not the same as sexual violence.** According to the Istanbul Convention, sexual violence includes engaging in non-consensual sexual intercourse, in other non-consensual acts of a sexual nature, or causing another person to engage in non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a third person (Istanbul Convention, Article 36). Both sexual violence and sexual harassment can take different forms, and while it is difficult to establish where one ends and the other begins, it is at the same time very important to distinguish between the two – **the terms must not be used or perceived as synonyms.**

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<sup>9</sup> In terms of sexual harassment, women in the survey were asked the questions stated above. With regard to each form of sexual harassment, women could indicate whether they had experienced it never, once, two to five times or six times or more. The prevalence of sexual harassment is based on respondents who reported having experienced one of the listed items at least once. Six forms of sexual harassment were selected for their severity, and they are referred to in this report as “the most severe forms” of sexual harassment.

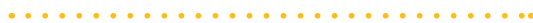
<sup>10</sup> OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women. Well-being and Safety of Women (2019), pp. 29-30.

It should be noted that, in public discourse, various forms of violence against women (including sexual harassment, sexual violence, domestic violence, etc.) are often used as synonyms. While one form of violence often leads to another, and many women have had multiple experiences of violence, it is important to recognize and acknowledge VaW in all its forms. The below definitions can be found in the Istanbul Convention and serve to clarify the focus of this brief:

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### **Violence against women (Article 3a)**

Violence against women is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.



### **Sexual violence (Article 36)**

Engaging in non-consensual vaginal, anal or oral penetration of a sexual nature of the body of another person with any bodily part or object; engaging in other non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a person; causing another person to engage in non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a third person. Consent must be given voluntarily as the result of the person's free will assessed in the context of the surrounding circumstances.



### **Sexual harassment (Article 40)**

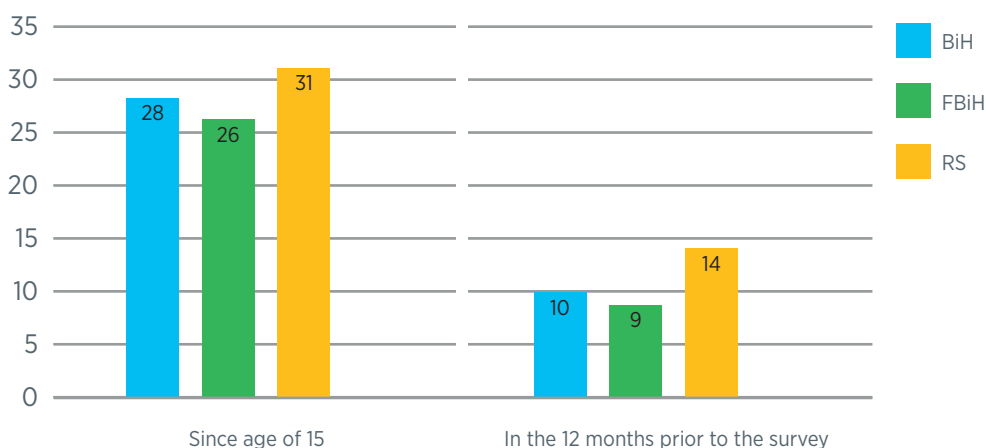
Any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, is subject to criminal or other legal sanction.

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ALMOST THREE IN TEN WOMEN IN BIH REPORT HAVING EXPERIENCED AT LEAST ONE FORM OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT SINCE THE AGE OF 15, AND 15 PER CENT OF WOMEN REPORTED BEING VICTIMS OF SEVERE FORMS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT.

Since reaching 15 years of age, 28 per cent of women surveyed in BiH reported having experienced at least one form of sexual harassment, with a somewhat higher prevalence noted in the Republika Srpska (RS) than in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH). One in ten women reported experiencing sexual harassment in the 12 months before the survey, with a higher percentage again noted in RS (Figure 1).

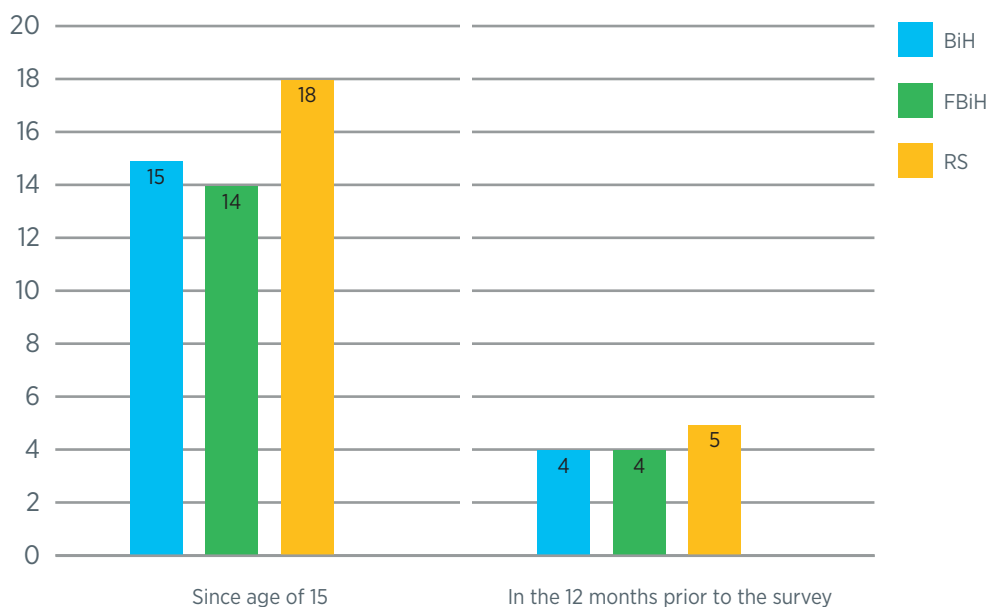
Figure 1: Prevalence of sexual harassment in BiH, 2018:



Base: Women aged 18-74 in BiH (2,255); in FBiH (1,163); in RS (1,019).  
Source: OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women, 2019

Some 15 per cent of women in BiH reported having experienced the most severe forms of sexual harassment since the age of 15. Here, there is also a 4 per cent difference between women living in RS and those in FBiH (Figure 2). Four per cent of women surveyed in BiH experienced severe forms of sexual harassment in the 12 months preceding the survey. In this case, insignificant differences between the two Entities were noted (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Prevalence of the most severe forms of sexual harassment in BiH, 2018:**



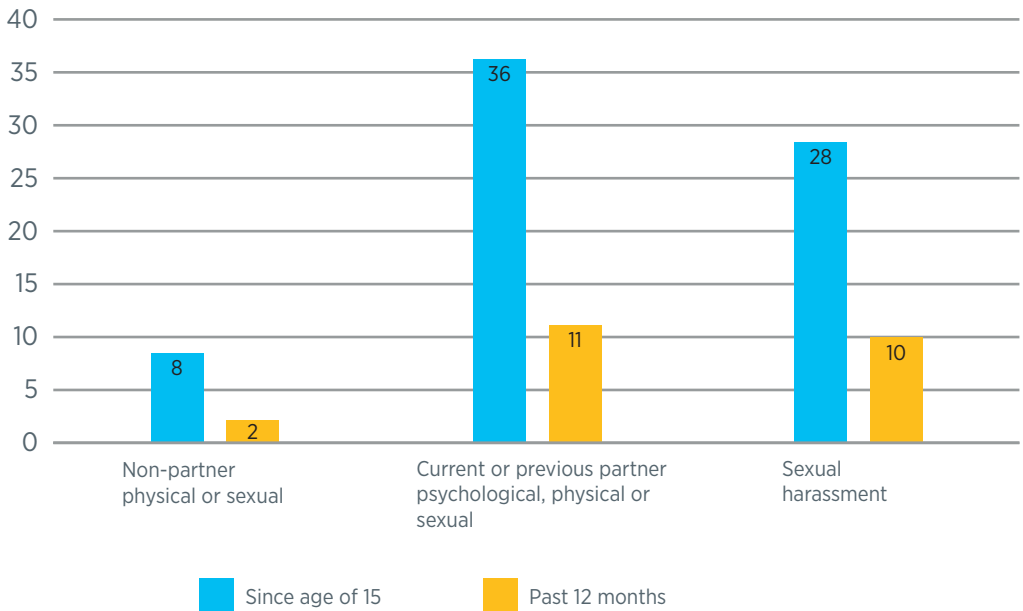
Base: Women aged 18-74 in BiH (2,255); in FBiH (1,163); in RS (1,019).

Source: OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women, 2019

SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS ONE OF THE MOST PREVALENT FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN.

**Sexual harassment is one of the more prevalent forms of gender-based violence.** It is more prevalent than other forms of non-partner violence, including physical or sexual (28 per cent vs. 8 per cent and 2 per cent respectively). However, according to the survey, it is less prevalent than current or previous partner violence which was reported by 36 per cent of women (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Prevalence of different forms of gender-based violence against women in BiH, 2018:

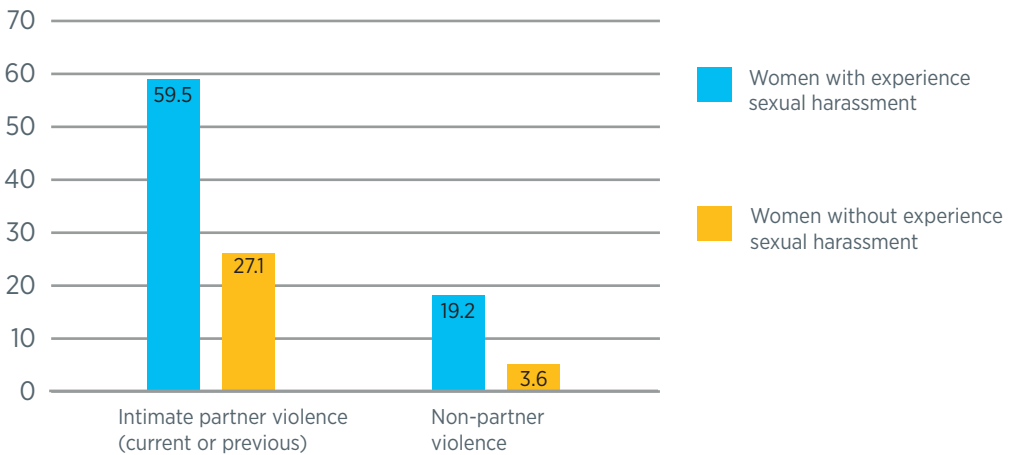


Base: Women aged 18-74 in BiH (2,255), in FBiH (1,163), in RS (1,019)  
Source: OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women, 2019

SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS PART OF THE COMPLEX ISSUE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN. WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED SEXUAL HARASSMENT ARE ALSO MORE OFTEN VICTIMS OF OTHER FORMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE.

The survey results underline that sexual harassment is a part of the complex phenomena of violence against women. **Women who disclosed that they had experienced sexual harassment were more likely to report having experienced other forms of partner or non-partner violence.** However, this could also be a consequence of differing levels of readiness to report the various forms of gender-based violence. Women can often omit to perceive or react to 'milder' forms of sexual harassment as some of these are still socially accepted or tolerated.

**Figure 4: Prevalence of intimate partner violence (current and previous) and non-partner physical and sexual violence among women with and without experience of sexual harassment, per cent:**



Base: Women aged 18-74 in BiH (2,255).

Source: OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women, 2019

THE PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN BIH IS LOWER THAN IN THE EU AND IN OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE REGION, BUT THIS COULD BE DUE TO LOWER AWARENESS OR REDUCED READINESS TO DISCLOSE IT IN THE SURVEY.

**According to the survey, the reported prevalence of sexual harassment in BiH is lower than in the European Union (EU) (28 per cent vs. 55 per cent) and other countries in Western Balkans and Eastern Europe (Figure 5).**

However, this does not necessarily mean that sexual harassment is less present, but **could also imply that women are less ready to disclose it.** A similar trend was noted in the main report,<sup>11</sup> where a lower prevalence of sexual harassment was noted as compared to that of the EU (45 per cent vs 55 per cent respectively). This could be explained by the so-called Nordic paradox in which countries with longer traditions of gender-equality policies and awareness-raising campaigns also have higher percentages of women reporting sexual harassment.<sup>12</sup> While 55 per cent was the EU average disclosed in the FRA survey, prevalence rates ranged from 81 –71 per cent in Sweden, Denmark, France, the Netherlands and Finland, to 32 –24 per cent in Portugal, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria.<sup>13</sup>

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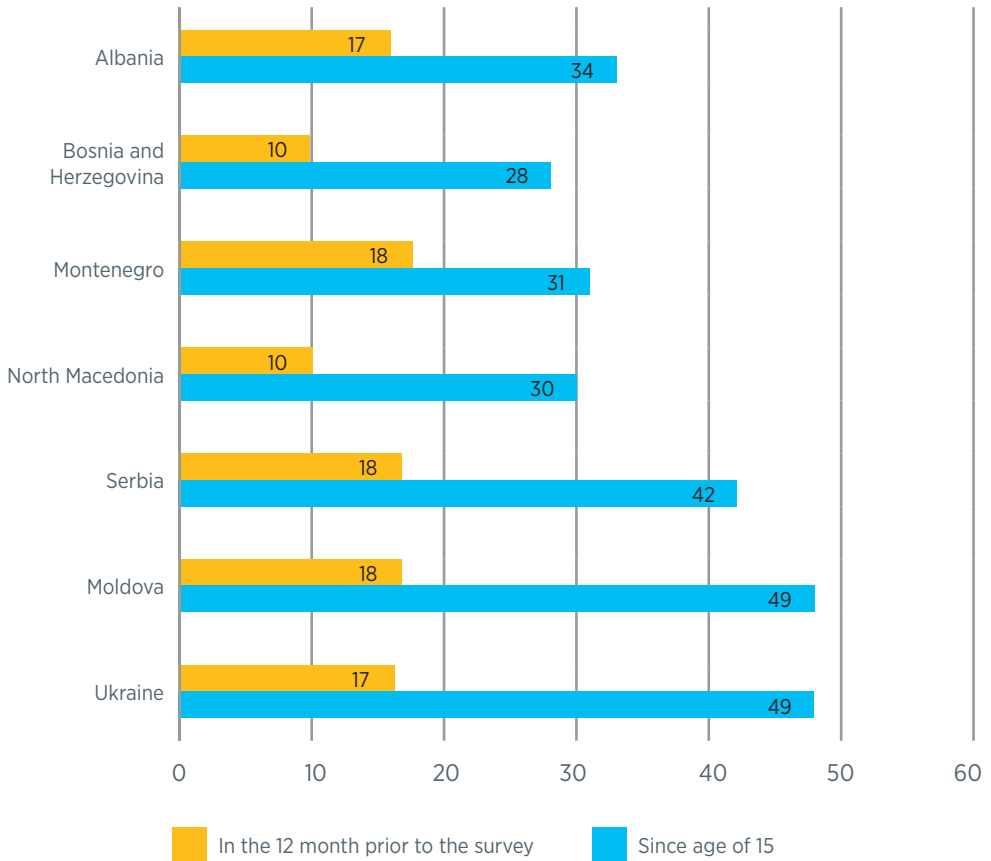
<sup>11</sup> OSCE –led Survey on Well-Being and Safety of Women, Main Report, 2019  
413237\_0.pdf (osce.org)

<sup>12</sup> For more info on the phenomenon please look into relevant research on so-called Nordic Paradox  
The Nordic Gender Equality Paradox (nordicparadox.se), Digging into the “Nordic Paradox” |  
(youngfeminist.eu),

<sup>13</sup> fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14\_en.pdf (europa.eu), page 99



**Figure 5: Prevalence of sexual harassment by country, 2018, %**



Base: All participants in the OSCE-wide survey (women aged 18-74 (15,179)).  
 Source: OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women, 2019

Although the prevalence of all forms of sexual harassment is systematically lower in BiH and its Entities than in other countries as shown in the Main report (except in the case of inappropriate offensive advances on social networking websites and internet chat rooms in RS), the same forms appear to be the most prevalent both in BiH and other countries, such as inappropriate staring or leering that women find intimidating, intrusive and offensive questions about one’s private life, sexually suggestive comments or offensive jokes, unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing, and intrusive and offensive comments about one’s appearance (Table 1).

**Table 1: Prevalence of different types of sexual harassment, %**

Type of sexual harassment	OSCE survey average	BiH	FBiH	RS
Inappropriate invitations to go out on dates	9.8	7.1	7.3	6.8
Intrusive and offensive questions about private life	14.2	11.6	10.6	13.7
Intrusive and offensive comments about appearance	11.4	8.5	7.5	10.4
Inappropriate staring or leering	19.2	16.4	15.8	17.8
Inappropriate offensive advances on social networking websites or in internet chat rooms	6.6	6.6	6.1	7.7
<b>The most severe forms</b>				
Unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing	11.4	7.3	7.0	7.8
Sexually suggestive comments or offensive jokes	12.0	8.9	7.8	11.1
Sending or showing sexually explicit pictures, photos or offensive gifts	2.7	1.7	1.3	2.1
Indecent exposure	4.2	2.3	2.5	2.0
Being forced to watch/look at pornographic material against one's wishes	0.6	0.5	0.7	0.2
Unwanted and offensive sexually explicit emails or text messages	4.0	3.3	3.2	3.9

Base: All women aged 18-74 (region: 15,179; BiH: 2,182; FBiH:1,163; RS=1,020).  
Source: OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women, 2019

The most serious incident of sexual harassment for 28 per cent of surveyed women was inappropriate staring or leering that made them feel intimidated, followed by intrusive questions about one's private life (16 per cent), unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing (15.3 per cent), sexually suggestive comments or offensive jokes (10.7 per cent), inappropriate invitations to go on dates (8.1 per cent), intrusive comments about one's physical appearance (7.4 per cent), inappropriate advances on social networks (6.2 per cent). Other forms were mentioned less frequently.

**MEN ARE USUALLY THE PERPETRATORS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT.  
PERPETRATORS INCLUDE PARTNERS, FRIENDS, ACQUAINTANCES,  
CO-WORKERS, AND STRANGERS.**

Women who reported having experienced sexual harassment most often point to **unknown perpetrators** (62 per cent). Perpetrators who were known to the victims were often friends, acquaintances, or neighbours (29 per cent), or someone else familiar to the victim but not specified in the available categories (23 per cent). A colleague or boss was reported by 17 per cent of women as being responsible for the sexual harassment they experienced.

The perpetrators vary to a degree depending on the type of sexual harassment reported. **Intimate partners** (current or previous, former boyfriends) are most frequently reported as the perpetrators of unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing, and they **are the main perpetrators of the forced watching of pornographic material** (Table 2). **Acquaintances, friends, or neighbours are more often stated as the perpetrators of intrusive and offensive questions about one's private life, intrusive and offensive comments about one's appearance, sexually suggestive comments, or offensive jokes.** This pattern follows other countries in the region,<sup>14</sup> yet differs from the EU where intrusive comments and offensive questions as violations of women's privacy are less frequent than the four other forms.<sup>15</sup> It can be assumed that the higher prevalence of this form in BiH is due to cultural patterns which consider it more acceptable to ask or comment on women's private lives, even though this form can be particularly bothering and serves to make victims feel uncomfortable.

**In the workplace, women experience numerous forms of sexual harassment perpetrated by their colleagues and bosses.** This tends to manifest itself through inappropriate invitations to go out on dates, intrusive and offensive comments about one's appearance or private life, but also through severe forms, such as sexually suggestive comments or offensive jokes. Strangers are the main perpetrators of acts such as inappropriate staring or leering, inappropriate advances on social networks and the internet, and offensive, sexually explicit emails or SMS.

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<sup>14</sup> See for example Serbia, OSCE (2019) *Sexual harassment in Serbia*, <https://www.osce.org/mission-to-serbia/473253>

<sup>15</sup> See OSCE-led survey on violence against women. Well-being and safety of women. Bosnia and Herzegovina result report, p. 34.

**Table 2: Perpetrators of sexual harassment by their relationship to the victim and form of harassment, multiple answers, percentage of answers:**

Type of sexual harassment act	Current or previous partner, boyfriend	A date, someone they just met	Acquaintance, friend, neighbour	Colleague, boss	Another known person	Stranger	Other	Total
Inappropriate invitations to go out on dates	5.3	18.0	10.8	10.8	12.6	29.0	13.5	100
Intrusive and offensive questions about private life	5.2	9.5	25.4	12.5	10.8	7.7	28.9	100
Intrusive and offensive comments about appearance	11.7	10.1	16.6	7.8	14.9	18.3	20.6	100
Inappropriate staring or leering	4.1	8.8	8.2	6.1	6.6	54.0	12.2	100
Inappropriate offensive advances on social networks, internet	5.1	9.5	2.3	2.9	7.5	62.0	10.7	100
<b>The most severe forms</b>								
Unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing	24.6	12.9	4.7	6.6	13.3	29.9	8.0	100
Sexually suggestive comments or offensive jokes	13.2	9.3	16.6	14.8	10.5	24.7	10.9	100
Sending or showing sexually explicit pictures, photos, or offensive gifts	3.3	18.5	11.1	5.9	14.8	40.7	5.7	100
Indecent exposure	10.6	6.2	6.5	1.6	6.3	56.6	12.2	100
Being forced to watch or look at pornographic material against one's wishes	81.5	3.8	-	-	-	14.7	-	100
Unwanted and offensive sexually explicit emails or SMS messages	14.4	9.5	9.3	6.4	5.3	35.4	19.7	100

While the perpetrators tend to be men, this is not always the case.

Men were identified as the perpetrators by 53 per cent of respondents, women are mentioned in 4 per cent of cases, while 34 per cent of victims said that both **men and women were involved**.

**In 18 per cent of the most serious incidents of sexual harassment, more than one person was involved.**

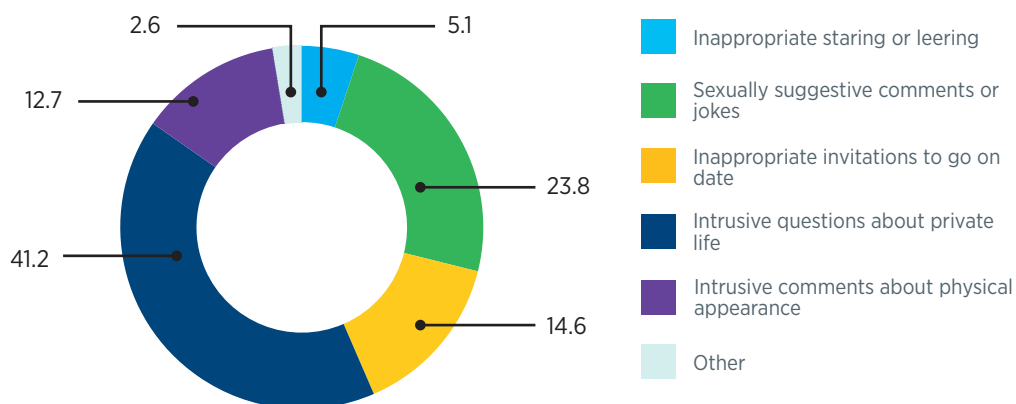
The number of women in this category<sup>16</sup> is relatively small, preventing a fully detailed analysis (76 cases), but some insights show that these were most often forms of sexual harassment that manifested as intrusive and offensive questions about one's private life (37 per cent), inappropriate staring or leering (21 per cent), sexually suggestive comments or offensive jokes (11 per cent), unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing (9 per cent), and inappropriate advances on social networks (9 per cent), while other forms appear in lower numbers. The perpetrators of such acts are diverse, but most frequently these were friends, acquaintances, and neighbours (23 per cent), strangers (19 per cent), relatives and family members (10 per cent), co-workers (10 per cent), somebody else they knew (9 per cent), and partners (8 per cent).

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<sup>16</sup> Women were asked about their relationships to the perpetrators as well as the gender of those responsible for each type of sexual harassment they experienced. They were also asked to describe the most serious incident of sexual harassment and describe the perpetrator(s).

Among women who experienced sexual harassment during the 12 months preceding the survey, 14 per cent reported that the perpetrators were bosses or colleagues. The most frequent types of sexual harassment were intrusive questions about one's private life and sexually suggestive comments or jokes, followed by inappropriate invitations to go on dates, inappropriate staring or leering, and intrusive comments about physical appearance (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Sexual harassment in the workplace, by type, per cent:**



Women who experienced at least one form of sexual harassment by co-workers (boss or colleague) in BiH (67).  
Source: OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women, 2019

The number of women who reported to have experienced [sexual harassment in an educational setting](#), whether committed by professors or peers, is small (32 cases in BiH, or 1.4 per cent), so a more detailed analysis is not possible.<sup>17</sup>

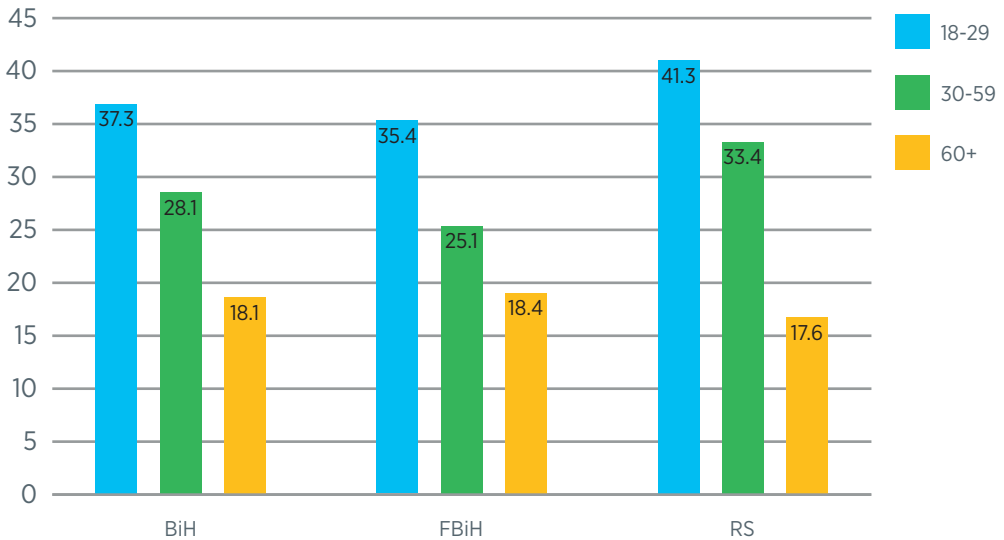
<sup>17</sup> At the time of survey, 6.9% of women from the sample were still in education (123 women).

WOMEN AT HIGHER RISK OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT ARE USUALLY YOUNGER AND ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE, OFTEN IN PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT, AS WELL AS STUDENTS, WOMEN IN URBAN AREAS, AND THOSE IN A VULNERABLE SITUATION.

**The likelihood of exposure to sexual harassment is higher among younger women who are economically active, particularly those who are in precarious employment, women in education and those in a vulnerable situation. Prevalence is also higher among women living in urban areas in comparison to those living in rural areas** (33.6 per cent vs. 23.4 per cent in BiH as a whole, 32.5 per cent vs. 20.7 per cent in FBiH and 38.2 per cent vs. 25.7 per cent in RS).

Younger women are more likely to report having been a victim of sexual harassment than older women. The possible reasons behind this are complex. First, lower lifetime prevalence rates among older women could be at least partly a consequence of the lapse of time and fading memories of experiences of harassment. Second, intergenerational differences in awareness of sexual harassment, or that older women did not interpret experiences as harassment due to changing societal norms, are also likely. This should be kept in mind when observing the higher prevalence rates among younger women, meaning that sexual harassment is not necessarily on the increase, but that memories of such experiences are livelier and that younger women are more ready to disclose such experiences. However, it is realistic to expect that some forms, such as sexual harassment via digital technologies and the internet, are more prevalent among young women.

**Figure 7: Prevalence of sexual harassment since the age of 15, by age and Entity, per cent:**



Base: Women aged 18-74 in BiH (BiH:2,255; FBiH:1,163; RS:1,019).  
 Source: OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women, 2019

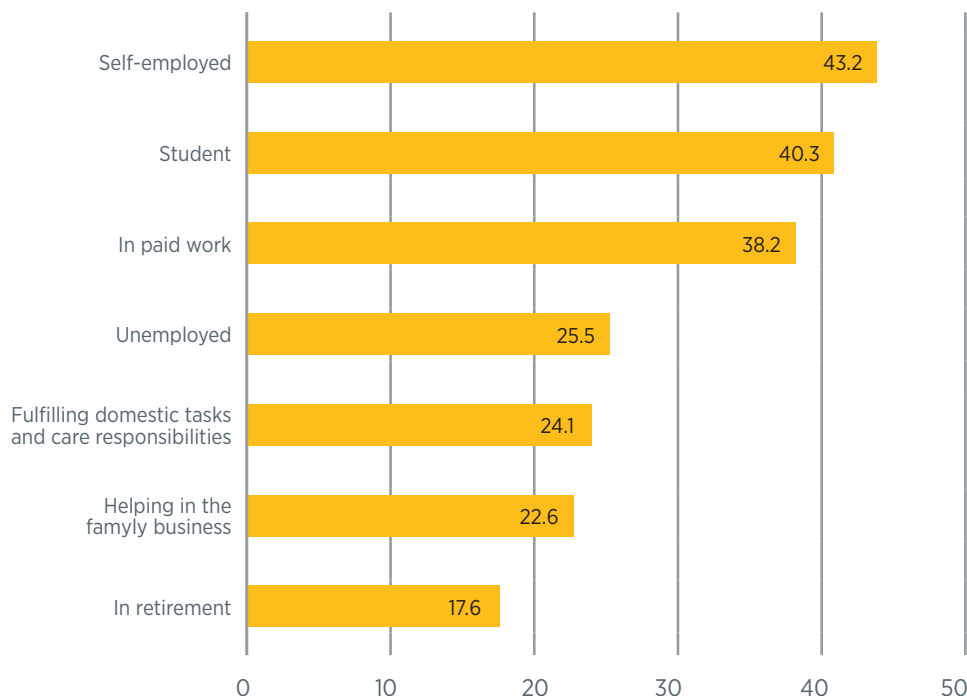
Regardless of the possible explanations of the differences between young and older women which can be attributed to factors other than age, age does influence the results. This is confirmed by data on short-term prevalence – the experiences women had during the 12 months before taking part in the survey. Data show that 17.3 per cent of young women (18-29) experienced sexual harassment in the past 12 months, compared to 9.8 per cent of women between 30-59 and 5.1 per cent of women aged 60 or older.

**Exposure to sexual harassment increases with rising participation in various spheres of social life. Women who participate in the labour market and who are in education more often reported sexual harassment than those who do not participate in these spheres** (Figure 8). There is also an effect of the type of employment, as self-employed women more often reported sexual harassment than those in paid work with other employers or women helping in a family business. Women in precarious employment are especially exposed. Among those who are only occasionally employed, 45.2 per



cent reported experiencing sexual harassment since the age of 15, compared to 37.4 per cent of those who are in full-time employment. The higher risk of sexual harassment among women in precarious, casual employment can be probably attributed to the fact that, in such employment, workers enjoy less protection of their rights, including protection from gender-based violence.

**Figure 8: Prevalence of sexual harassment by activity status, per cent:**



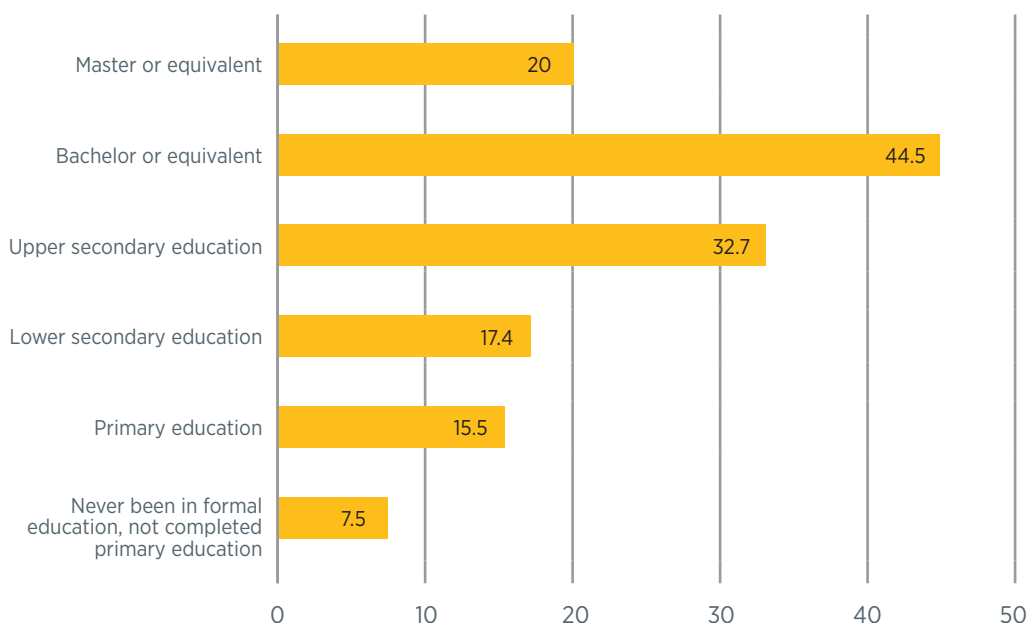
Base: Women aged 18-74 in BiH (2,255).

Source: OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women, 2019

Women from deprived backgrounds are also more exposed to sexual harassment. More than one third (32.5 per cent) of women suffering very serious income deprivation reported having experienced sexual harassment, compared to 26.5 per cent of women who reported that they live comfortably on their present income.

There is a certain effect of education level on the reported prevalence of sexual harassment. Namely, **women with a bachelor's degree disclosed significantly more that they had experienced sexual harassment than women with secondary and primary education.** This, however, is likely also linked to higher awareness of sexual harassment and readiness to share such experiences among those with higher education. It could also be linked to those with a higher level of education participating more actively in public life, which increases the risk of sexual harassment.

**Figure 9: Prevalence of sexual harassment by the level of education, per cent:**

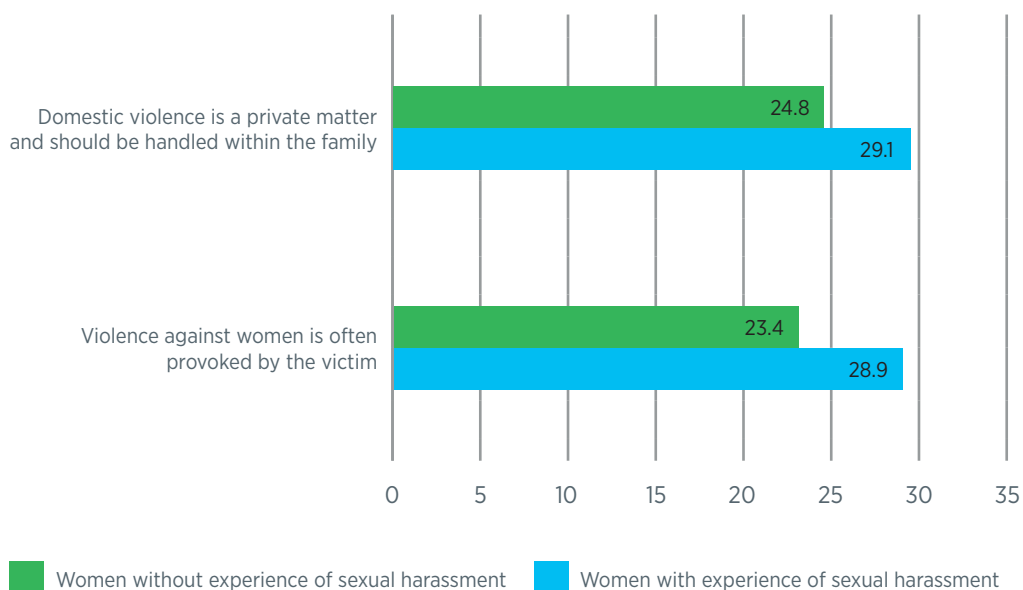


Base: Women aged 18-74 in BiH (2.255).  
Source: OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women, 2019

**There is a correlation between attitudes towards violence against women and the likelihood of disclosing an experience of sexual harassment.**

Among women who disagree and strongly disagree with the statements “violence against women is often provoked by the victim” and “domestic violence is a private matter and should be handled within the family”, there is a higher rate of reported sexual harassment. It should, however, be noted that this could be linked to higher awareness and preparedness to disclose such experiences and not necessarily to a higher prevalence of sexual harassment (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Percentage of women who disagree and strongly disagree with attitudes among women who disclosed and women who did not disclose the experience of sexual harassment:**



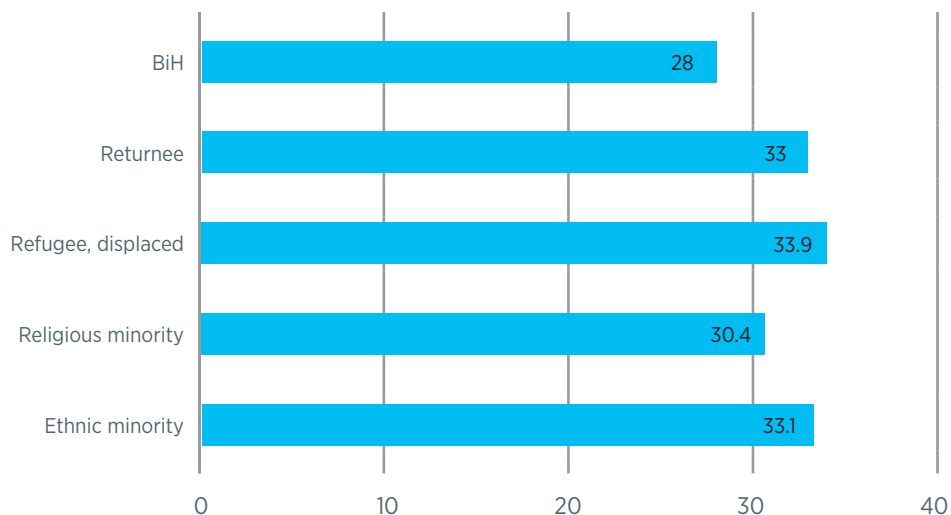
Base: Women aged 18-74 in BiH (2,255).

Source: OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women, 2019

**Women belonging to minorities and those who were displaced during conflict were significantly more likely to be victims of sexual harassment.**

Women who belong to an ethnic or religious minority, refugees, displaced persons and returnees all noted an above-average prevalence of sexual harassment (Figure 11).

**Figure 11: Prevalence of sexual harassment by minority and forced migration status, per cent:**



Base: Women aged 18-74 in BiH (2,255); ethnic minority (130); religious minority (46); refugee, displaced (118); returnees (109).

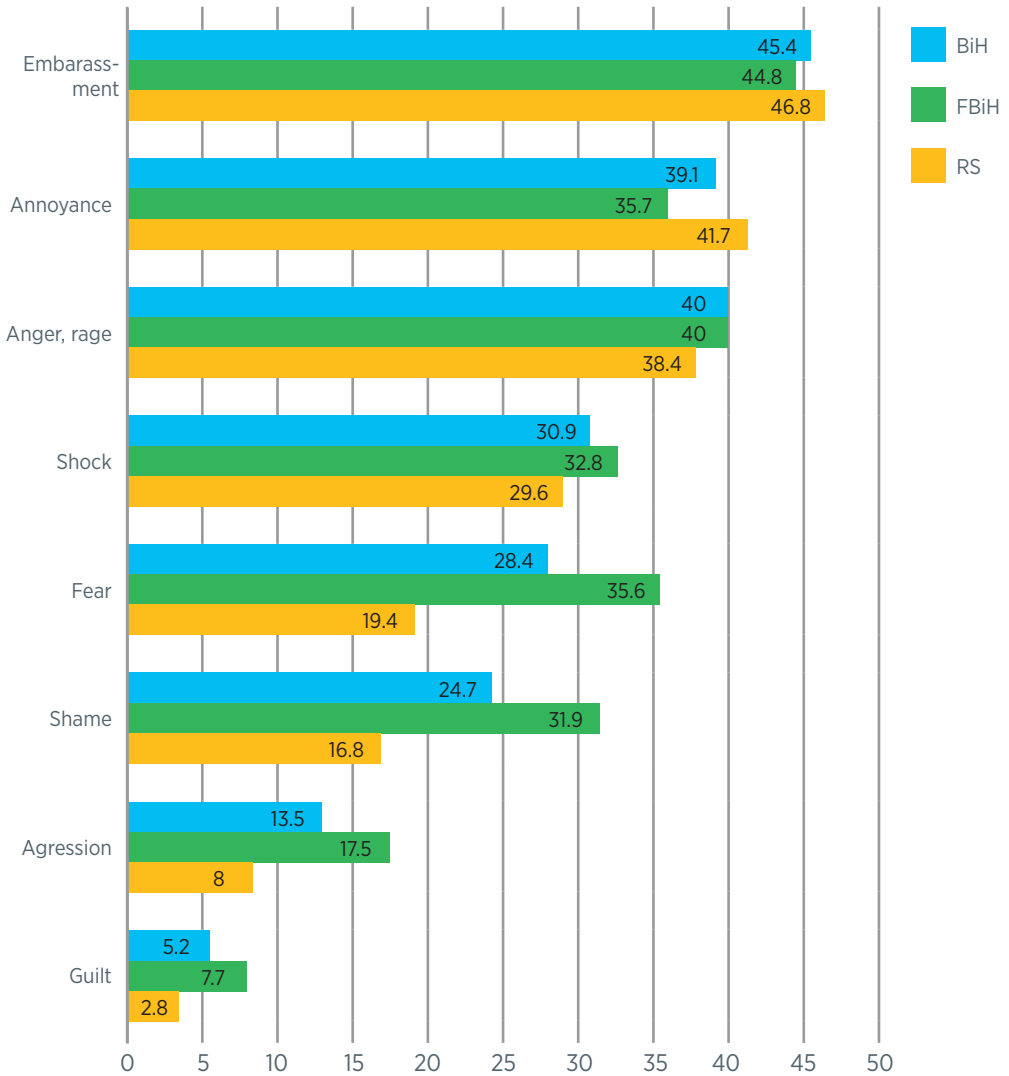
Source: OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women, 2019

**SEXUAL HARASSMENT TRIGGERS PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES.**

**The most common emotional responses to the most serious incident were embarrassment, followed by annoyance and anger, shock and fear, shame, aggression, and for some women a feeling of guilt** (Figure 10). In the survey, women living in FBiH were more likely to report shock, fear, shame, aggression and guilt than women living in RS, who were more likely to report suffering annoyance and embarrassment (Figure 12).

The consequences are more profound when victims are exposed to multiple and repeated incidents of harassment.

**Figure 12: Women’s emotional responses to the most serious incident of sexual harassment, by entity, per cent:**

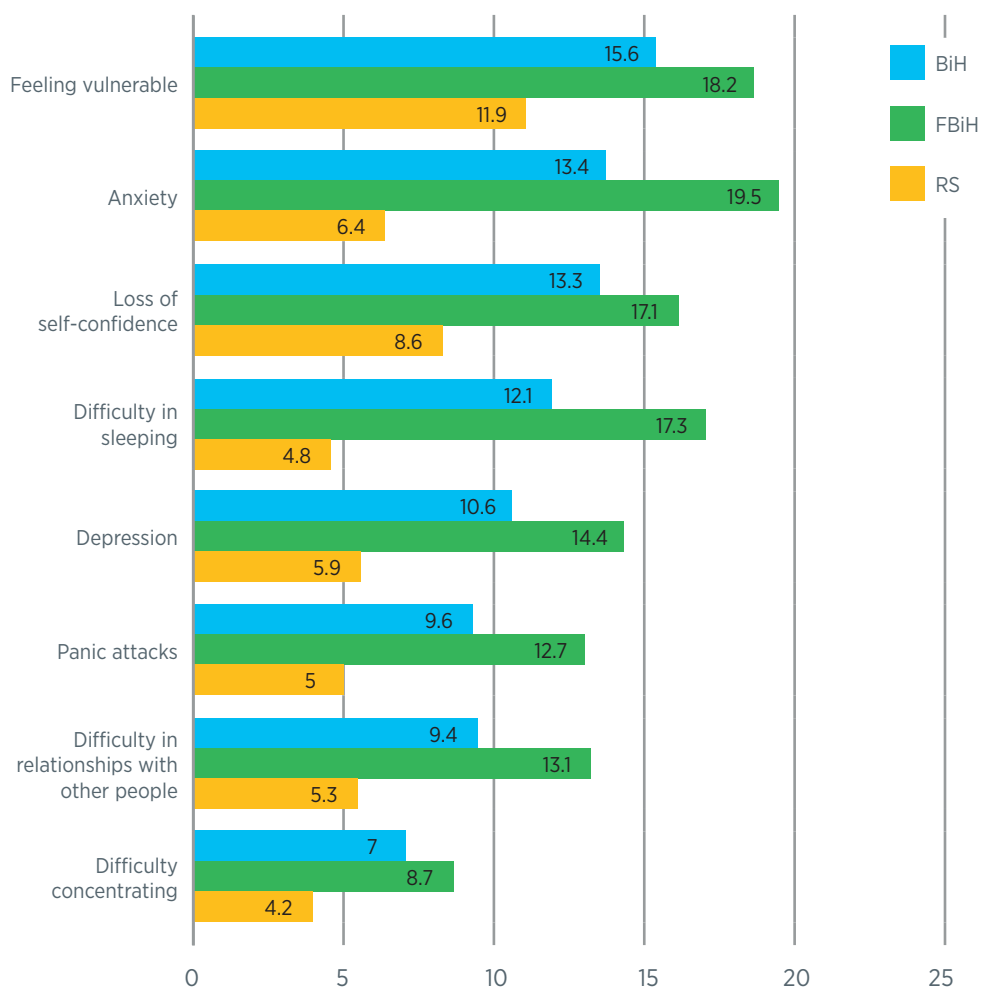


Base: Women aged 18-74 who reported a most serious incident of sexual harassment, (BiH: 450; FBiH: 241; RS: 199).

Source: OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women, 2019.

The most frequently reported **psychological consequence is feeling vulnerable, followed by anxiety, loss of self-confidence, difficulty sleeping, depression, panic attacks, difficulty establishing relationships with other people, and difficulty concentrating.** The survey findings indicate differences between women living in FBiH and RS, with the former more likely to report all listed psychological consequences. This could be linked with lower readiness to report and share experiences of sexual harassment among certain groups, but survey evidence does not provide ground for a reliable conclusion on the origin of these differences.

**Figure 13: Psychological consequences of the most serious incident of sexual harassment, by entity, per cent:**



Base: Women aged 18-74 who reported a most serious incident of sexual harassment, (BiH: 450; FBiH: 241; RS: 199).

ISource: OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women, 2019

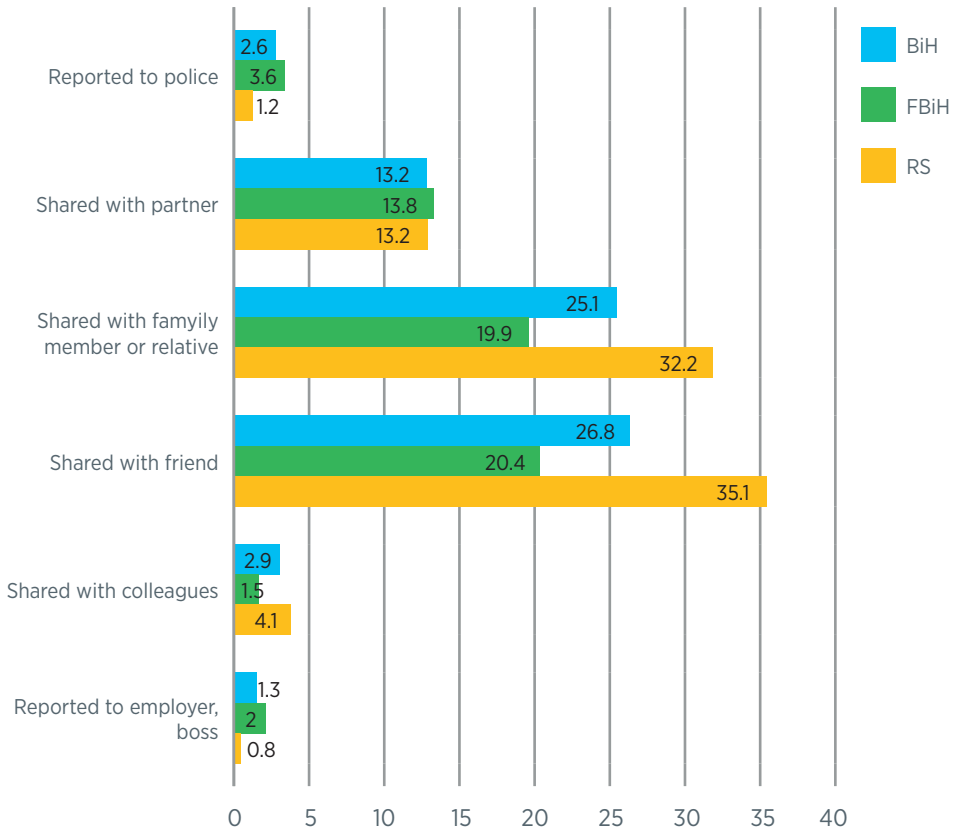
A MAJORITY OF WOMEN DO NOT REPORT SEXUAL HARASSMENT TO THE AUTHORITIES. ONLY 12 WOMEN (2.6 PER CENT) REPORTED INCIDENTS TO THE POLICE. IN CASES WHERE WOMEN SPEAK OUT ABOUT BEING SEXUALLY HARASSED, THIS IS PRIMARILY WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY.

The majority of women who experienced sexual harassment did not tell anyone and did not report it to the authorities or institutions engaged in the protection of women from gender-based violence. Only 32 per cent of women who experienced any form of sexual harassment since the age of 15 confided in someone else about their experience. Differences between women living in FBiH and RS are significant in this respect, as women from RS reported more willingness to open up about such experiences than women in FBiH (44.6 per cent vs. 24.4 per cent).

**Only 12 of 450 victims reported sexual harassment to the police (2.6 per cent).** Women mainly shared information with their immediate social circles, such as friends and family, and did not report cases to the authorities or organizations in the protection system (Figure 14). The significant differences between women living in FBiH and RS appear only in regard to being open about such experiences with family and friends. Women in RS reported more readiness to share information about their experiences with friends and family than those in FBiH. In other respects, the differences are not statistically significant.

Based on these findings, it is likely that sharing information relieves the psychological burden women suffer due to sexual harassment. This notion is reinforced by the fact that women from FBiH are more reluctant to share information and are also more likely to suffer psychological consequences.

**Figure 14: Women with experience of sexual harassment who shared their experience with others, by entity, per cent:**



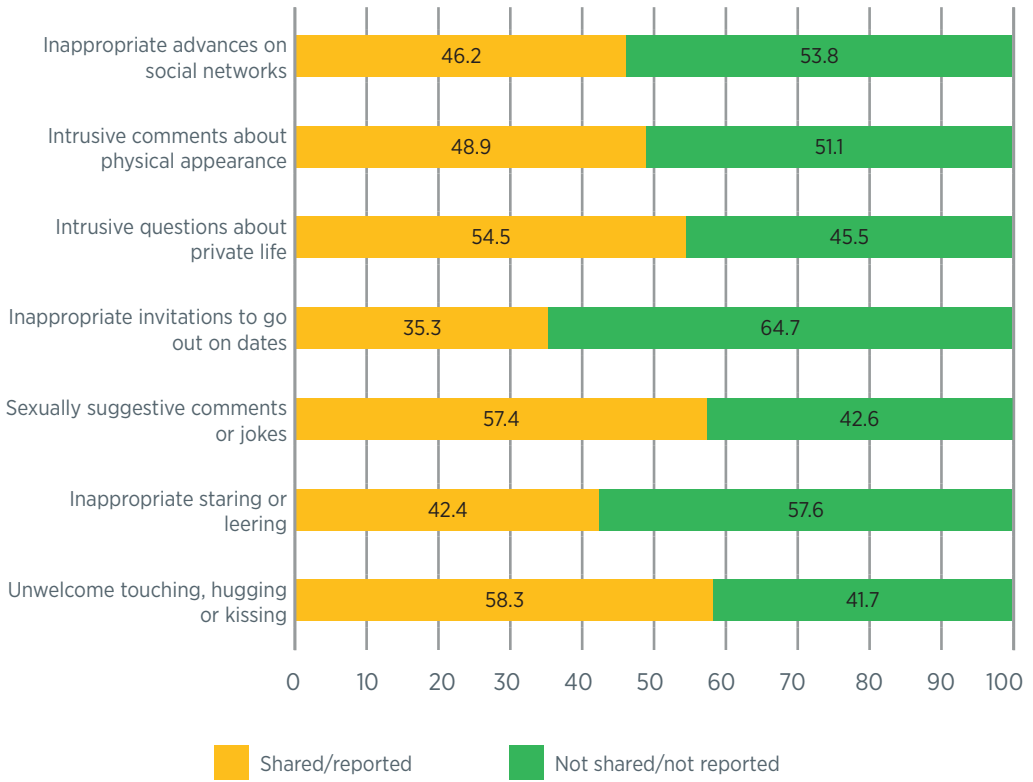
Base: Women aged 18-74 who reported a most serious incident of sexual harassment, (BiH: 450; FBiH: 241; RS: 199).

Source: OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women, 2019.

**Victims are more likely to share their experiences of certain forms of sexual harassment** (Figure 14). While experiences of receiving intrusive questions about one’s private life, sexually suggestive comments or jokes and unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing were shared by the majority of women who pointed to these forms as the most severe incident of sexual harassment, fewer told others about receiving intrusive comments about their appearance, inappropriate invitations to go out on dates, inappropriate advances on social networks, and inappropriate staring or leering.



**Figure 15: Percentage of women who pointed to different forms of sexual harassment as the most serious incident they experienced and sharing/reporting that incident to others, per cent:**

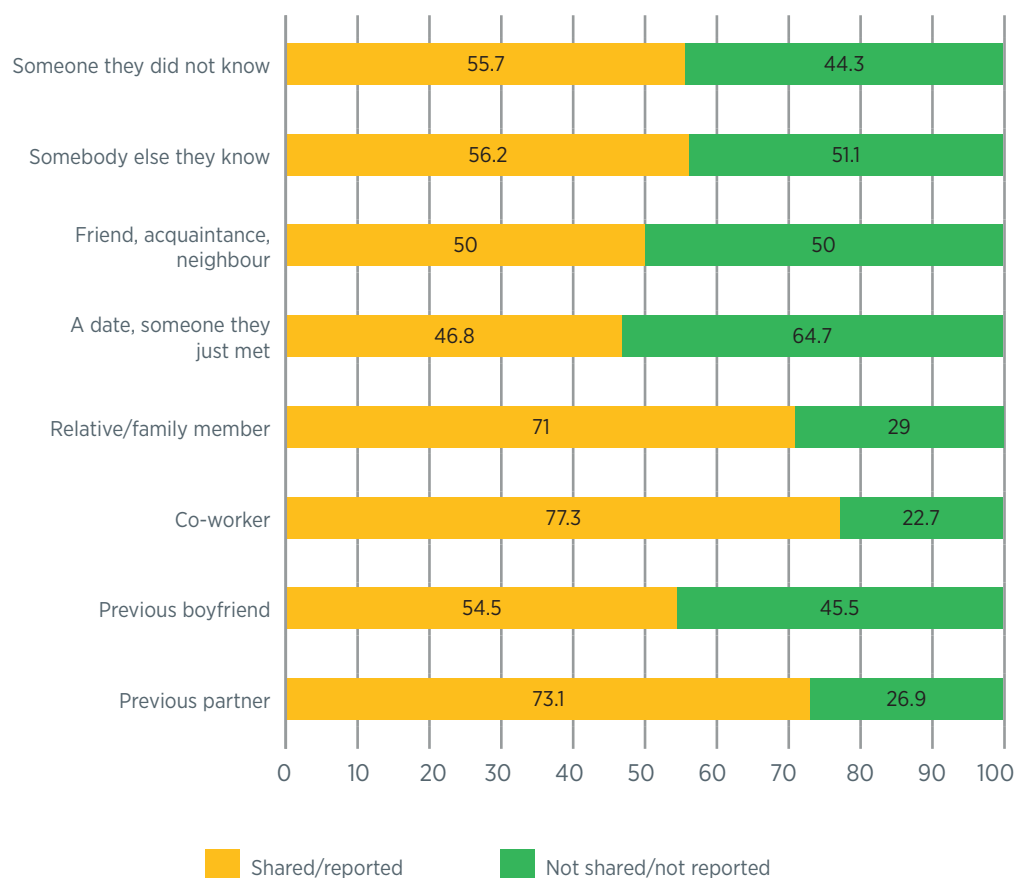


Base: Women aged 18-74 who reported a most serious incident of sexual harassment, (BiH: 450; FBIH: 241; RS: 199).

Source: OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women, 2019

Similarly, **women were more likely to report incidents of sexual harassment committed by certain perpetrators.** The survey shows that victims are more likely to report the most serious incidents of sexual harassment committed by previous partners, family members and co-workers, than those committed by dates, friends, acquaintances, neighbours, or other known or unknown persons (Figure 16).

**Figure 16: Percentage of women who experienced the most serious incident of sexual harassment by listed perpetrators who shared/reported that incident, per cent:**



Base: Women aged 18-74 who reported a most serious incident of sexual harassment, (BiH: 450; FBiH: 241; RS: 199).

Source: OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women, 2019

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Sexual harassment is a serious security issue for women and girls in BiH. The findings underline the importance of a twin-track approach to improving the prevention of sexual harassment and the protection of women from this form of gender-based violence:

1. Continuous work on increasing awareness of sexual harassment as a form of gender-based violence among both women and men.
2. Improving protection mechanisms at all levels of governance and in all relevant settings.

## INCREASING AWARENESS

Awareness-raising activities should be directed through several channels, covering all relevant groups:

- Awareness-raising campaigns should be designed and implemented in a way to target women of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds. Such campaigns should take advantage of widely used media and technologies whenever possible. Information programmes should target women from disadvantaged groups, including those with disabilities, minorities, and those living in rural areas.
- Awareness-raising activities should be designed and implemented at all levels of formal education through the regular curriculum, extracurricular activities, and peer to peer learning.
- Campaigns directed specifically towards young people should be implemented using channels and forms that are widely used by this group, such as social networks, blogs, electronic media content, etc.
- A broad campaign should be directed towards the wider population with clear messages on what constitutes sexual harassment, why it is harmful, and how it should be addressed.
- Ensure that the above-mentioned initiatives are coordinated to send uniform messages to the public and key stakeholders.

## DEVELOPING AND IMPROVING PROTECTION MECHANISMS

It is necessary to encourage the establishment of mechanisms for protection against sexual harassment at various levels and in different settings, including:

- The competent institutions in BiH, FBiH, RS, and BD together with gender institutional mechanisms should develop mechanisms to facilitate

the reporting of sexual harassment in all spheres of life, including within the work and education contexts, and dealing with its consequences and implementing Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 27 March 2019 on Preventing and Combating Sexism.

- ❑ Responsible ministries and institutions in the FBiH Government, the RS Government, the BD Government, and cantonal governments, in collaboration with gender equality mechanisms and civil society organizations, should support the improvement of the referral system for survivors and strengthen and standardize protocols at the local level. It is essential to ensure that women from disadvantaged groups, including women with disabilities and from minorities (in particular Roma) can access these services.
- ❑ Employers should be encouraged to establish prevention and protection mechanisms to protect staff from sexual harassment at work. Trade unions should play a proactive role in monitoring and reacting to cases of sexual harassment in the workplace.
- ❑ Inspectorates for work at all levels should establish prevention and protection mechanisms as well as develop and adopt relevant laws and protocols to ensure the protection of workers from sexual harassment.
- ❑ Educational institutions should establish prevention and protection mechanisms at all levels.
- ❑ Other institutions delivering public services, such as those offering healthcare and social protection, should have mechanisms to prevent sexual harassment and protect employees and clients/beneficiaries.
- ❑ Independent bodies, such as the Ombudsman Institution, should monitor and react in relation to cases of sexual harassment in settings including work, education, and public services.
- ❑ Competent ministries and institutions of the FBiH Government, the RS Government, the BD Government, involved in the system of protection together with statistical institutions should ensure the development of a shared methodology for data collection and reporting around gender-based violence and co-ordinate said data collection on violence against women. Using consolidated data across all relevant stakeholders should be made a priority to enable reliable and efficient reporting at all tiers of government.

Gender equality mechanisms at State and Entity levels should take the lead in the establishment and promotion of such protection mechanisms.